



**Mennonite
Central
Committee
U.S.**

920 Pennsylvania Ave. SE
Washington, D.C.
20003

Washington Office

Tel: (202) 544-6564
Fax: (202) 544-2820
mccwash@mcc.org

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Dear Senator,

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is a relief, development and peacemaking organization with programs in over 70 countries. One of its stated goals is to “equip people to live in community and to respond redemptively to interpersonal and systemic conflict, harm and injustice within families, communities and congregations.” Mennonites have been a leading voice in promoting restorative justice programs that carry out this goal both in the United States and around the globe.

Because of its commitment to respond to crime and injustice in ways that are restorative to all people involved and redemptive to offenders, MCC urges you to support S. 3155, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act of 2008 (JJDP). This bill contains necessary improvements to the juvenile justice system and could be strengthened further by amendments to provide for confinement conditions that better protect vulnerable youths, improved incentive grants language, and a phase-out of the statutory authority to confine youth status offenders in juvenile facilities.

The JJDP has provided safeguards for youths, families and communities for over three decades with the ultimate goal of rehabilitating young offenders and reducing juvenile delinquency.

We applaud the further progress represented by the core requirements of S. 3155, which include:

- Strengthening the deinstitutionalization of status offenders (DSO) core requirement: Under current law, non-delinquent status offenders, such as children who are truant, runaway or in violation of curfew, may be held in juvenile lock-ups under the Valid Court Order (VCO) exception, which allows judges to issue detention orders. The practice persists despite evidence that securely detaining status offenders is harmful to prosocial development and costly, and is less effective at rehabilitating young people than shelter care, crisis counseling, family support, and/or community and school based interventions. While S. 3155 requires judicial findings and establishing a ceiling of 7 days for secure detention, we strongly support an amendment to phase-out altogether the VCO exception to protect status offenders from being locked up, where they are vulnerable to victimization and at risk of developing delinquent behaviors.
- Strengthening the Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) core requirement: Because youth of color are disproportionately over-represented and subject to more punitive sanctions at all levels of the juvenile justice system, S. 3155 provides clear direction to states and localities, asking them to plan and implement data-driven approaches to ensure fairness and to reduce racial and ethnic sentencing disparities.
- Improving the Jail Removal and Sight and Sound core requirements: Research shows youth confined in adult jails and lock-ups face increased recidivism and high risks of assault and suicide. S. 3155 extends the jail removal and sight and sound core requirements to keep youth awaiting trial in criminal court out of adult lock-ups under certain circumstances. This is an important step in the right direction towards eventually removing juveniles from adult facilities altogether.
- Allowing states to continue to place youth convicted in adult court in juvenile facilities without jeopardizing federal funding: S. 3155 would permit many states to continue allowing youth convicted in adult court to serve their sentence in juvenile facilities until they reach the extended juvenile

jurisdiction age. This reverses current law, which penalizes states that utilize more appropriate and humane placements for youth.

MCC strongly supports the steps S. 3155 takes towards preventing juvenile crime and rehabilitating young offenders. Thank you for your time and efforts on behalf of families, communities and young people across the country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Rachelle Schlabach".

Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach
Director, MCC Washington Office